



Stress

Acute stress is a psychological response to a threat, real or imagined, and if sustained chronically, it can cause several negative effects in our health – one of them is fat storage.

Scientists believe that acute stress isn't caused by a past or future event in itself, but by our internal response and our ability to cope with it. When we are faced with a situation, it's our perception of the situation that will determine whether or not it will trigger a negative stress response. Whereas some of us will see the same event as a "challenge" (something we can cope with), others may see it as a "threat" (something they can't cope with).

High psychological stress is associated with:

- Higher cortisol levels (weight gain)
- Suppressed immune function
- Decreased sleep
- Increased consumption of comfort foods
- Increased alcohol consumption
- High blood pressure
- Abdominal fat accumulation
- Faster ageing

Researchers concluded that abdominal obesity results when chronic stress causes elevated secretion of the stress hormone cortisol, which activates enzymes to store fat. The fat cells around our middle have 4 times more cortisol receptors than the fat cells found right beneath our skin. Consequently, cortisol is drawn to the central fat cells, which ups fat storage around our stomachs.

The more central fat you have, the higher your risks of serious illnesses like heart disease, diabetes and hypertension (high blood pressure).

Stress Index

Instructions: Circle the number which comes closest to representing how true the statement is for you right now. Then, score yourself, using the key at the bottom of the page.

- | Less True | More True | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | A close family member/friend died in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I moved to a new town in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Purchase of a new house in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I changed jobs in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | My son/daughter left home in the last 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | A close friend/family member who is ill depends on me for care. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I've had a major health problem in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | A close relationship ended in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I lost my job or retired in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I got married in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I took on a lot of debt in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I got divorced in the last 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I lost a lot of money in the past 12 months. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I have ongoing marital problems. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I have ongoing financial problems. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I have ongoing trouble with friends or relatives. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I have ongoing problems meeting family demands. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I have ongoing pressure at work or school. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I have ongoing pressure with emotional problems. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | I am constantly facing do-or-die deadlines. |

Total score (add up all the numbers)

Scoring key

- 20 – 35: Virtually stress free
- 36 – 50: Somewhat stressful
- 51 – 75: Stressed – watch out
- 76 – 100: Super stressed

Stress management

Sometimes you may feel like there is nothing you can do about stress. The bills need to be paid, the kids have demanding schedules, work puts pressure on you, the house doesn't clean itself, the meals don't just magically appear and there aren't enough hours in the day. It can be very overwhelming and sometimes it is hard to focus on the important issues because you are so caught up in the daily routines.

The good news is you have more control than you might think. Managing stress is all about taking charge of how you deal with problems, how you schedule events and duties, how you think and feel about what's going on.

A **stress journal** can help you identify the stresses in your life and how you deal with them. Use the journal on the next page to keep a daily "stress log".

Once completed, look at how you currently cope with stress – are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy?

Unhealthy ways of coping with stress:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overeating• Undereating• Too much alcohol• Smoking• Withdrawing from friends & family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using pills or drugs to relax• Sleeping too much/too little• Procrastinating• Watching too much TV/videos/computer• Taking out your stress on others
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Ways to reduce or better manage stress

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn how to say "no"• Avoid people who stress you out• Take control of your environment• Shorten your to-do list• Get rid of "shoulds"• Manage your time better• Be more assertive• Express how you feel• Adjust your attitude• Focus on the positives• Accept things that can't be changed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn to forgive• Have some fun• Nurture yourself• Exercise• Relax• Keep a sense of humour• Connect with others• Eat healthy• Avoid alcohol, cigarettes and drugs• Get enough sleep
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Stress Journal

Day	What caused the stress?	How did I feel about it?	How did I act?	What did I do to make myself feel better?
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Stress Elimination

Note that this section is titled Stress Elimination not Stress Reduction.

Work through each point and tick it off, once you've handled it – or if it doesn't apply to you.

- If my job, business or profession is harming me and I can't seem to make it completely stress-free, I have quit, sold it or am changing professions.
- I have made a list of all the promises that I have made to others that are causing me stress, even if it's stress that I can handle.
- I have revoked all of these promises and have worked something out.
- I have identified the three primary sources (people, roles, expectations of others) of my current stress.
- I have completely eliminated these three items.
- I have cut out most volunteer activities, unless they directly support all of my life.
- All bills, paper and administrative tasks have been outsourced and are electronically handled and/or I have an assistant who handles everything administratively, automatically.
- Any legal, tax or financial clouds or problems have been completely resolved.